

ansible



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From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.co.uk. Fax 0705 080 1534. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cute unicorn for Mr Moorcock: **Sue Mason**. Available for SAE, lembas, Narya, Nenya, or Vilya.

SINISTER WHITE POWDER. Teresa Nielsen Hayden reports a recent NYC subway trip that was mightily delayed because someone had dropped a powdered-sugar-coated doughnut on the platform. Michael Swanwick, whose wife works in a state Bureau of Labs, provides the inside information that 'Most of the powder sent in to be tested, incidentally, turns out to be cocaine.' Meanwhile, a jiffybag leaking fine white grains arrived at *Ansible* HQ and proved to be a gift packet of sweets from an interviewer, 'Cosmic Flying Saucers filled with Sherbet Moon Powder'—or rather, thanks to some postal worker's massive boot, no longer exactly filled.... • And a Happy New Year to all of you.

The Arts of the Enemy

Ray Bradbury Day was Friday 14 December, declared his long-time fan Mayor James K. Hahn of Los Angeles (Bradbury's home since 1936). Will weather reports confirm that this was the day it rained forever?

Arthur C. Clarke is telling correspondents about his accidental sf prediction at the start of *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973). Although the year is 2077, the place Italy and the method a natural meteor impact, his own huge disaster does indeed happen on 11 September. [BR]

Harlan Ellison notes that his sf awards 'pale into insignificance before the singular fact that I am the author of the longest running serial in the history of science fiction. It's been going since 1956....' The latest episode of *Nissassa* is in the 2001 issue of Lee Hoffman's *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* (founded 1951), guest-edited by Geri Sullivan, Jeff Schalles and the late Terry Hughes. 'Fifty years? That's not too many.'

Philip José Farmer, who is 83, is recuperating at home after a stroke suffered in mid-December. Complete recovery is hoped.

Mike Moorcock, like everyone else except your editor, went to the movies: 'I actually saw *Lord of the Rings* (en famille—that is, the nieces and in-laws watched, Linda snored gently through most of it, to wake up occasionally to utter a snort of irritation, and I had to leave twice in spite of me bad legs, just to get away from the boredom. Wow). Okay, Mr Langford, ask your readers this—since Prof Tolkien pooh-poohed most science fiction for not being logical in its world-building, especially its languages, of course, and since he swore that this was not a post-holocaust fantasy, how come these early industrial revolution kulaks, with sophisticated metal working skills, gunpowder, focussing lenses and advanced printing methods, couldn't make one simple fucking cannon and blow the bad guys off their keeps in a trice? Jesus, they could put an intercontinental ballistic missile together with the resources I spotted in hobbitville without even thinking about it, since my eye kept wandering off the leprechauns and wizards. [...] It's the last fucking unicorn opera I watch in a long while. Frankly, *Star Wars* was a lot more convincing and I thought that was crap, too.'

Janet and Chris Morris, former sf writers, have a US \$9.5 million defence contract to evaluate 'the use of nanoparticles to clear facilities' of biological threats. Apparently the Morrises became 'leading authorities on nonlethal weapons, like high-powered microwaves, pepperballs, and calming agents' after a former CIA deputy director of intelligence read their 1984 novel *The 40-Minute War* and liked it enough to recruit them as defence advisers. (*Wired*, Jan) [MMW] We look forward to the equivalent of NASA spinoff technology, such as nanoware that instantly clears bolognese sauce contamination from one's shirt facility.

Brian Stableford, reproved by editor Ginjer Buchanan for hinting that market considerations influenced a Sharon Shinn novel, has wickedly reviewed Shinn's *Summers at Castle Auburn* with all sordid market details (price, publisher) censored.... (*New York Review of SF*, Dec 01)

Condog

23 Jan • **BSFA Open Meeting**, Rising Sun pub, Cloth Fair, London, EC1. 7pm on, fans present from 5pm. Guest speaker: er, dunno.

1-3 Feb • **Contabile-Fortean** (filk), Hilton International, Basingstoke. £25 reg (the announced 1 Jan increase is cancelled), £12 supp or concessions. Contact 34 Star Rd, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 4HB.

9 Feb • **Picocon 19**, Imperial College Union, Prince Consort Rd,

London, SW7 2BB. £8 reg, students £5, ICSF £2. GoH Anne Gay, China Miéville, Stan Nicholls. Contact 51a Goldhawk Rd, London, W12 8QP.

9 Feb • **Reminiscon Fifty**, Hanover Hotel, Schooner Way, Cardiff. Celebrating Lionel Fanthorpe's 50 years in print. Contact 48 Claude Rd, Roath, Cardiff, CF24 3QA. 'Supported by Welsh Academi.'

2-3 Mar • **Microcon 2002**, Exeter University. Guests TBA. Contact 79 Alphington Rd, Exeter EX2 8JE. Phone 07740423320.

8-10 Mar • **MeCoN V**, Queen's University of Belfast. £15 reg to 7 Mar 02, then £17. Contact 30 Bendigo St, Belfast BT6 8GD.

29 Mar - 1 Apr • **Helicon 2** (Eastercon), Hotel de France, Jersey. GoH Brian Stableford, Harry Turtledove, Peter Weston. £35 reg, £18 supp/junior. Contact 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Newbury, Berks, RG14 6SY. Membership is reportedly rather low, and bookings would be welcomed from those who just haven't got around to it....

6-7 Apr • **Unconvention 2002** (Fortean), Commonwealth Inst, S. Kensington, London. Contact information at www.forteanimes.com. Featuring 'The World's Most Fortean Object: Rev Lionel Fanthorpe'.

29 Aug - 2 Sep • **ConJosé** (60th Worldcon), San José, California. Now \$180/£125 reg. Contact PO Box 61363, Sunnyvale, CA 94088-1363, USA; UK agents 52 Westbourne Tce, Reading, RG30 2RP.

Rumblings • Eastercon 2005? A rumour from Novacon: certain parties were checking out Torquay hotels for 25-28 March 05. [DL]

Infinitely Improbable

Publishers & Sinners. On 4 December, Time Warner announced the closing of its e-books division iPublish, several of whose dozen or so titles were sf/fantasy. The e-books revolution is perpetually hailed as about to be next year's great publishing success....

R.I.P. Sidney Leonard Birchby, UK sf fan and correspondent since the 1930s, 'died, aged 82, at home in Manchester on 29 December 2001 after a short illness,' writes his brother John. Sid Birchby remembered the fannish impact of the 1937 Leeds convention (which he missed) as 'like thunder in the heavens'; he attended his first London Thursday fan meeting in December that year, when the venue was a Lyons teashop rather than a pub and Thursday was said to have been chosen because it was editor E. John Carnell's weekly half-day off. [T1] • **Dan DeCarlo** (1919-2001), the Archie Comics cartoonist who created Sabrina the Teenage Witch, died on 18 December; he was 82. [PB] • **Jack C. Haldeman II** (1941-2002), sf author since 1971, Joe Haldeman's elder brother, and a popular figure at US conventions, died on 1 January from complications of kidney cancer after entering a hospice on 30 December. Jay Haldeman, as friends called him, was only 60 and is much missed. His most recent novel was *High Steel* (1993), written with Jack Dann; they were working on a sequel. • **Nigel Hawthorne** (1929-2001), UK actor famed as Sir Humphrey in the BBC-TV *Yes, Minister*, died on 25 December aged 72. His sf movie credits include the Judge Dredd clone *Demolition Man* (1993) and the 1981 film of Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*. He also had voice roles in *Waterstep Down* (1978), *The Black Cauldron* (1985), and *Tarzan* (1999). [SG]

As Others See Us. '... most science fiction is closer in spirit to astrology than astronomy.' Thus 'Bookworm' in *Private Eye* (28 Dec), slagging off J.G. Ballard's *The Complete Short Stories*. [TA] The same review relocates the Golden Age of sf pulps: 'The early stories generally aim no higher than they reach, which is the level of pulp-magazines like *Science Fantasy* and *New Worlds*.' Also, "'Why I Want To Fuck Ronald Reagan" seems oddly less prescient now than when it appeared in an underground magazine in 1968.' Well, what a surprise.

From the Edge of Forever. Native American sf author Russell Bates, who sold to *The Last Dangerous Visions* at age 29 in 1970, and again in 1972, marked his 60th birthday last year by withdrawing both stories for publication elsewhere. All this 'will be chronicled in a science fiction short story, "The Lurker In The House At The Center Of Infinity", to be published in 2002, wherein a writer/editor, "Elias Halloran", is using a John Storer-like ethereal web to draw on the creative juices and talents of all who were lulled into contributing to a volume that never

is published, and the house in question is so microscopically arranged and calculated to be the drawing rune. Unscramble "Elias Halloran" and you cannot make anyone else's known and existing name from it.'

Small Press. Ben Jeapes of Big Engine has plans to launch a new British sf magazine. A fresh challenge for Mr Pringle's *Interzone*? Ben muses on titles: 'I thought *Eat Dirt*, Pringle might strike the right balance between hostility and friendly challenge ... though he's seen so many of the opposition come and go, I doubt he'll lose much sleep.'

Respect At Last. The *Oxford English Dictionary* asks learned sf fans to help with citations of sf/fan terms whose earliest printed appearance is uncertain. See http://66.108.177.107/SF/sf_citations.shtml.

Random Fandom. Eileen Gunn was jet-setting in December: 'Just back from Moscow, a bit jetlagged, and quite surfeited with caviar and vodka. Moscow is so much cheerier now than on previous visits. I'd have bet against the Russians, however jolly they might feel inside, learning to smile, but it's happened. And there's a shopping explosion—these are a people with world-class shopping skills, honed over 75 years of deprivation, so don't get in their way.' • Paul Rood spied on a celebrity signing tour: 'Random Shopper 1, spotting all the signs and the big queue snaking around the block: "Terry Pratchett? Who's he, then?" Random Shopper 2: "Oh, you know, he's quite famous—he's the guy who wrote *The Hobbit*." • M.J. 'Simo' Simpson is to write Douglas Adams's biography for Hodder & Stoughton, with a tight July 2002 deadline. 'Adios, day job!' *Ansible* readers with relevant anecdotes (e.g. meeting Adams at Seacon '79 or Hitchercon 1) are urged to contact mjsimpson@btinternet.com. Fanzine interviews are also sought.

Thog's Counterfactual Masterclass. Fay Weldon hints that she's from an alternate 20th century: 'Or, as Winston Churchill would say—himself the son of a love-and-money match between an English Lord and an American heiress—"up with which in the end everyone would have to put". It is a truism—at least to my generation—that Churchill sent back for re-writing memoranda containing sentences which ended with prepositions.' (*Letters to Alice: On First Reading Jane Austen*, 1984). [YR]

C.o.A. *Andromeda Bookshop* in Birmingham is sporting a 'To Let' sign, and Rog Peyton confirms they have to move by Easter; surplus stock is being sold off at discount prices. *Sandra Bond & Simon Amos*, 7 Granville Rd, London, N13 4RR. *Gary Farber*, 3365 Chisholm Trail #204, Boulder, CO 80301-5219, USA. *Ian McDonald*, 99 Mt Merrion Park, Belfast, BT6 OGA. *David Stewart*, 70 Heath Square, McKee Ave, Finglas, Dublin 11, Ireland. *Jan van 't Ent*, Vaalserberg 137, 2905 PM Capelle aan den IJssel, Netherlands (only the apartment number is new). *Alison Weston*, Keyenveldstraat 31, 1050 Brussels, Belgium. *Lucy Zinkiewicz*, 2 The Crescent, York, YO24 1AW.

In Typo Veritas. '... the sea boiled, great birds spat fire from the sky, and metal breasts rose up from the waves and destroyed the harbours.' (Samuel R. Delany, *The Jewels of Apor*, Gollancz 2001 ed) [CD]

Award Stuff. The BSFA Award has a new category: Writing About SF. Critical articles, essay collections/anthologies, and complete books are all eligible. Nominations (BSFA members only) close 31 Jan. 2001 works so far nominated are Stephen Baxter's BSFA-published collection *Omegatropic* and, mysteriously, Terry Pratchett: *Guilty of Literature* from 2000. [M] • The Hubbard Award was announced as a special ConJosé Hugo rewarding 'outstanding achievement in presenting science fictional concepts as fact to the general public'—to be given to Whitley Strieber for unforgettably linking the phrase 'alien contact' with 'rectal probe' and so setting back the SETI movement by fifty years. Yes, it's all a joke from a satirical web site; but the Hugo administrators were still alarmed by e-mail requesting seat reservations for the Hubbard presentation. [KS] Next, Retro Hubbards for past egregiousness? • *New York Times Notable Books of 2001*: Liz Williams's *The Ghost Sister* was listed in the sf section, quite a coup for a first novel by a Briton. • *The Blue Peter Books of the Year* are chosen by a jury of children from adult-prepared nominations. Farah Mendlesohn on the 2001 selections: 'It turned out to be a good year for sf with all but one of the major awards going to sf/fantasy (Best Book to Read Aloud was Alan Aldberg, *The Bravest Ever Bear*). Best Book I Couldn't Put Down: William Nicholson, *The Wind Singer*. A Special Book to Keep Forever: Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Kite Rider*. Book of the Year: *The Wind Singer*. Books of All Time: 1 *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling was the only author not to turn up to collect her award); 2 *Double Act*, Jacqueline Wilson; 3 *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; 4 *Northern Lights*; 5 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.... Of all the books listed for the three judged awards, eight out of fifteen were sf or fantasy.'

Quotable. Terry Pratchett updated an old saying while appearing on the *South Bank Show*: 'At 17, if you don't think *Lord of the Rings* is

the greatest contribution to literature there's something wrong with your head. If you still think that at 50, there's definitely something wrong with your head.'

Faster Than Lawsuits. Wendy Graham, editor of the sf webzine *FTL* at ftlmagazine.com, is having full and frank discussions with the new *FTL Science Fiction* at ftlsfci.com. The latter may change its name.

• Meanwhile, what of David Leddick's novel *The Sex Squad* (1999)? As the blurb tells us, 'In the 1950s, seventeen year old Harry Potter moves to Greenwich Village, NY, to pursue a career as a ballet dancer. [...] Torn between passion and his true love—dancing—Harry must come to a decision about whom he loves, who he is, and what he is willing to sacrifice for the world of ballet.' [DK] Changing the era to the 1950s and Quidditch to ballet surely won't deceive J.K. Rowling's lawyers for long.

Fanfandery. Chris O'Shea is said to be intending to stand against Tobes Valois for the westbound TAFF race to ConJosé this year. [PNN]

End of an Era. *The Skeptical Inquirer* (Jan/Feb 02) reports that Martin Gardner, scourge of pseudoscientists since 1952, has decided at age 87 to stop writing a column for every issue of *SI* (odd articles may still appear). Can I keep up my current columns until 2040? H'mm.

Outraged Letters. Martin Abela felt *Ansible* should have run an obituary of George Harrison (1943-2001): 'Without George, *Monty Python's Life of Brian* would never have been made. The Python boys were in pre-production when some film studio Taliban-type decided that a humorous film about a man whose life echoed that of Jesus Christ's was too dangerous to be made. George decided he wanted to see the movie, so he talked to his business manager and founded his production company Handmade Films to secure the funding for *Life of Brian*. We owe George a debt of gratitude just for that one film. Handmade went on to produce many other fine films including the fantasy classic *Time Bandits*.' • Sir Arthur C. Clarke makes his bid for fame: 'Herewith my modest contribution to Thog's Masterclass. "You cad!" she hissed. Try it sometime! Thank you, Sir Arthur, but where's the attribution and date on which Thog insists? Is this from 2001? • Mike Moorcock yet again: 'I am now being paid in Exocets by Orion, who, of course, are owned by the same company that gives us the Exocet (Hachette etc). I pushed my advance up to three rockets per launcher. Cash isn't going to be much use in our coming economy. What are the Sussex Downs like for cave systems?'

Signs of the Times. Richard Bleiler was reproved by a copyeditor for an article on John W. Campbell Jr that used the phrase *in parvo*: 'The only reference to "parvo" in Webster's 10th is the contagious canine disease.' This from the once great Oxford University Press.

The Dead Past. *20 Years Ago*: our first Thog's Science Masterclass: 'Looking on the bright side, snow does bring some benefit to the garden. As it melts it undergoes a molecular transformation which produces deuterium oxide, better known as heavy water. This has a very stimulating effect on plant life.' (*Evening Post Advertiser*, cited in *Ansible* 23, Jan 1982) • *30 Years Ago*: 'Professor Tolkien was 80 earlier this month and, not unsurprisingly, articles have been appearing thick and fast.' (Peter Roberts, *Checkpoint* 14, Jan 1972) Anyone remember Professor Tolkien? • *36 Years Ago*. Tolkien gave his first major interview (which was also one of his last) to a news-stand magazine, whose editor still has a very special feeling for him: Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* 168 (1966).

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Nose Jobs*. 'A thick branch crashed through the tunnel, just missing Filidor's nose, and he carefully sliced it away before resuming his slow upward progress.' (Matthew Hughes, *Fools Errant*, 1994) [BED] • 'As his eyes continued to sweep over her, he noted the lean, elegant, body; but from the smallish hips and waist there grew a breadth of shoulders that suggested exceptional physical strength.' (David Baldacci, *The Winner*, 1997) [DB] • *Dept of Pop Science*. 'On this planet, the force of gravity was so immense—a hundred times greater than that of earth—that a man on its surface would have weighed ten tons and been unable to lift his eyelids. Under these conditions, the only intelligent life form to develop consisted of giant globular creatures, which on earth would have been called vegetables.' '... when a spider dies, its body turns into a lower form of life called a squid fungus—an octopus-like invertebrate that was fairly harmless to adults, but which loved to suffocate and consume sleeping children.' (both Colin Wilson, *Spider World: The Magician*, 1992) [BA]